

Letter from Taizé

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April - May 1996



THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS IN POLAND

Crossing bridges

"Dziękuję!" "Thank you!" Everyone picked these words up quickly, whether it was the young people from other countries welcomed with such warmth in Polish families, or the Polish families themselves touched by the kindness and faith shown by their guests.

On the morning of December 28, the city of Wrocław was all ready to welcome the young people that were to soon arrive from throughout Europe. The sun was there too, as if to help people withstand the -18°C temperature! All day long, the train station resembled a sort of ant-hill, with one line for new arrivals going out toward the welcome areas, and a second line going for those who were now heading to their host parishes. One could spot packages coming from all points of Eu-

rope. Those who had travelled the furthest, from Portugal, Albania, Georgia, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Ireland, Great Britain and Scandinavia could be seen mixing with those who had needed only a few hours to reach Wrocław, whether it was from other parts in Poland, from the Czech Republic or Germany. The presence of groups coming specially from Korea and Japan, together with other young people representing all the continents, provided a visible sign of reconciliation stretching beyond Europe's borders.

THEY WERE WAITING FOR
EACH AND EVERY GUEST

A guest in one's home is God in one's home," said Cardinal Gulbinowicz, as he greeted the young people gathered on the first evening in the vast Hala Ludowa. The way people were welcomed had made everyone quickly forget the cold. From the very start, the attentiveness shown made all realize that the people of Wrocław were waiting for each and every guest.

"While we waited at the bus stop, an elderly woman came up and offered a scarf to one of us who was visibly shaking with cold. Others saw cars stopping to ask if they could drive the young people to where they were going. Some of the newly-arrived were invited straightaway for a meal in people's

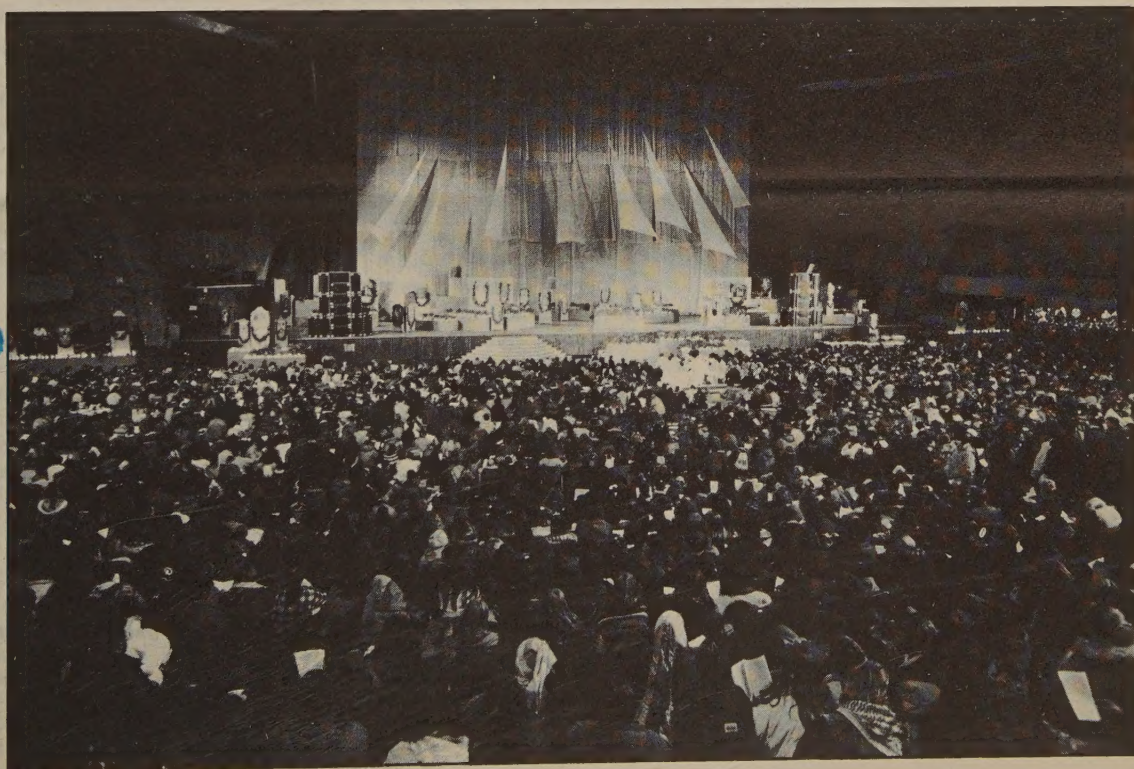
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Twice a day, part of the young people gathered under the Hala Ludowa dome, the others under three large tents.



homes, while others were offered hot tea. In the city, it was enough to appear a little lost in order to have people coming up to offer their help."

RECONCILIATIONS

We had received young people in our parish already during the European Meeting held six years ago, and so this time it was easier for us to ask people to be hosts; the experience of the first gathering had been so positive. Every Sunday we would explain that 'two square meters was enough to receive a guest', but the people often responded, saying, 'We will be the ones to sleep on the floor so that we can give our beds to the young people!' A novelty for Wrocław inhabitants was to see young people from nearby countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine and Rumania. Young people from these same countries have already attended recent European Meetings, but could not be present at the one in Wrocław six years ago. I can still see the surprised faces of one family who told the story of how on that first day they had opened the door of their home, expecting to see two German girls, only to find themselves with two Ukrainian boys on the doorstep. Once the meeting was over, they could not stop talking about how the faith and courage of these two Ukrainians had impressed them, and how thankful they were to change the image they had of that country. Other families told me how significant it had been for them to receive young Rumanians and to have understood, thanks to them, that we must not look only to the West."

The simple welcome people offered in their homes was in and of itself a gesture of reconciliation. A young German said: "We were hosted by an elderly couple. The husband spoke excellent German due to his



having spent years in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. 'You mustn't feel embarrassed', his son said to me. 'Since years already, he has reconciled himself with the past.' And true enough, I found in him a man who, though forgetting nothing of his past, held no ill-feelings towards anyone and who was determined to see that nothing so dreadful as that could ever happen again. I remember too another exchange we had. During the morning small-group meetings, a student from Sarajevo told us about her parish commitment and about the bonds of solidarity they had created with people who had lost their families and were looking for a place to live. We spoke at great length, wondering aloud about how we could all find strength and creative energy through prayer and the Gospel, and find ways to go beyond loneliness and despair wherever we might be. This was precisely the theme on Saturday afternoon at the meeting with German-speakers. And during that meeting, many young people were able to answer by sharing examples from their own experience."

160 PARISHES

The parishes of the city and the surroundings had been preparing their welcome for over a period of four months. In the end, there were so many offers of hospitality from families that not all could be met. Indeed, a flu epidemic, which hit just days before the meeting began, kept many young people from several eastern countries from attending. At 8 am on December 28, small teams in each of the 160 parishes were ready and waiting. Most would continue working on into the evening, and some even until midnight, receiving their guests. When young people were delayed and arrived late in their parish, the groups sometimes had to phone host families who were al-

ready sleep in order to ask if the young guests could still be sent to them. "From the moment of our arrival, we understood that the whole of Kielczow had been expecting us. Children were waiting for us at the bus stop, while sandwiches and hot drinks awaited us in the parish hall. In order to host 200 young people in this village of some 2000 inhabitants, the preparation team had personally visited every family. All knew why we were coming and had offered their assistance. I was anxious about the first morning prayer in the cold, unheated parish church, but once people arrived in the little building, had settled down and then began singing, the cold seemed to vanish."

"For me and my friends, it was extraordinary to be welcomed so warmly," said one German boy. "The grandmother who received us in her home showed us so much love. She was always concerned and wanted to know if we had enough warm clothing or if we had had enough to eat. She was 70 years old and managed to say only about three words in German, but she wanted to share her life with us. She was eager to know why we had come, what we did every day and what our hopes were for the future. Other friends of mine were touched to see to what extent their Polish hosts wanted to be able to actually understand them. And as for me personally, I was particularly moved to hear a woman explain



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Now she and her family had been forcibly moved after the second World War from what was now the Ukraine to Wroclaw, and how she had been able finally to forgive. My own family had gone through a similar experience, having to leave the Wroclaw region in order to settle in Germany."

All throughout the meeting, small-group gatherings held every morning in the parishes gave people the chance to share in greater depth with others. A young couple from Saint Anthony's parish said: "The people in our group came from four different countries and discussion was so intense that we forgot the time. We left late and arrived for midday prayer in the city center just as it was beginning. The conversation continued as we travelled into Wroclaw by tramway. We are so unaccustomed to talking about ourselves, and yet we found that trust among us grew rapidly. This gave us the courage necessary to speak and, by the end, we had discovered that really everyone had something important to share."

As part of the morning program, some parishes had invited local "witnesses", people from the neighborhood who worked in fostering solidarity, to come and speak with participants. "The meeting we had one morning inside a prison gave me a lot to think about," said one young Frenchman. "The people of the parish had already gone to meet the young prisoners twice before our coming and you could see there was confidence

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Each day Brother Roger delivered a brief meditation which everyone could hear translated into his or her own language.

between them. We sang and prayed, and then spoke together about why we were there, like witnesses of trust. Now that we are back home, what can we do to pay more attention to all the hidden suffering that exists here?"

"The desire to communicate was so strong that we invented our own language, where our hands and faces said more than our mouths could," remarked one Italian. "I learned a lot about Christian life in Russia and Poland. I could never have imagined that there were so many initiatives there, for example, on behalf of children and that it is young people my own age who organize meals for them, who play with them and help them with their school work."

THE COMMON PRAYERS

During the prayer on the first evening, the archbishop of Wroclaw, Cardinal Gulbinowicz, addressed the participants, inviting them to be bearers of trust and unity, to be open to all those who find life difficult or who suffer from the misunderstanding of others. He stressed how much joy parishes and families had found in welcoming the young people, and the effort made at all levels within the city. All together there were more than one hundred specially-organized trains, as well as tens of buses, which linked the city with outlying towns and villages daily. A hundred schools opened their doors for the morning meetings. And a host of young soldiers prepared and distributed hot tea every day, from morning to evening.

The common prayers were held simultaneously in a large indoor arena built at the beginning of the century, Hala Ludowa, and three immense, heated tents pitched in the city center. Towards the end of the prayer each evening, the icon of the cross was placed flat down in front and prayer

would continue there, as people came forward to entrust to Christ the sufferings of people in other parts of the world. Each day Brother Roger delivered a brief meditation which everyone could hear translated into his or her own language. When the singing began, the language-divide disappeared; participants would take up the melody together, no matter the language or their initial lack of assurance. Early in the meeting, Brother Roger posed the following question: "What gives credibility to Christians and to the Church? What increases confidence in the communion lived out on account of the risen Christ?" The common prayers stimulated participants to pursue this search. During prayer, one could note the presence of the archbishop of Wroclaw, two bishops responsible for Polish youth, the Lutheran bishop of Wroclaw, the youth chaplain of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow, as well as other Church leaders.

The afternoon program focused each day on a different theme. On Friday, a bible introduction followed by small-group discussion led participants to reflect about the significance of following Christ in their own lives. On Saturday, meetings organized by country provided an opportunity for sharing experiences in which people were seeking and living out reconciliation. And on Sunday, young people from different countries and continents shared their joys, hopes and struggle to build solidarity during an "intercontinental forum".

On Sunday morning, young people were invited to take part in the local parish eucharistic celebrations. The young Orthodox present, the Russians, Belarusians, Serbians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians gathered in the orthodox cathedral for eucharist celebrated by Mgr. Jeremias, the orthodox bishop of Wroclaw. Two choirs from Russia and Serbia led the singing. The Rumanians attended Orthodox mass in another city church. And at the same time, young Scandinavians, Germans, Swiss and others joined together at a Lutheran church for the weekly service with Bishop Ryszard Bogusz, the Lutheran bishop of Wroclaw.

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Choose to love..." But is love something we choose? And are there not many reasons to hesitate before making such a choice? Our world does not seem to reward those who choose to live not for themselves but for others. Will I have the courage to follow such a road, which involves the risk of vulnerability, and to keep going in spite of difficulties and disappointments?

It is essential to realize that, for Christians, love is not first of all a human act. Saint John writes, "This is

promised land, Moses sums up for the people the meaning of their history with these words: "Look, today I set before you life and happiness, death and misfortune... I set before you life or death, a blessing or a curse" (Deut 30,15-19).

This passage does not mean that life and death are equivalent, still less that God is indifferent to the fate of his people or wishes them to fail or suffer: Moses has just reminded his compatriots of all that God did for them to lead them to a better life. When the Bible speaks in this way, using pairs of

that is above all that of trusting in God and "opening our hearts to him just as they are" (Letter Choose to Love). God neither forces our hand nor acts in our stead, but his love takes the initiative to incite and support our response, like a "pearl of great price" (Matt 13,45-46) that impels us to give everything joyfully. This love is the presence in us of God's Spirit, "re-creating an inner unity when we are scattered or fragmented within."

And choosing life and love means letting that life and love overflow in all

Following Christ with a Steadfast Heart

what love is: not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins" (1 John 4,10). Saint Paul says something similar: "When we were helpless (in other words unable to love), Christ died for people who rejected God... The proof that God loves us is that Christ gave his life for us when we were unwilling to love" (Romans 5,6-8).

At the heart of the Gospel, then, we find the good news that "all God can do is give his love"; we discover a God who goes toward wounded human beings curled up in a posture of self-protection to offer them a new beginning in a relationship with him. This is all of Bible history in a nutshell: God offers a communion of love to human beings who, more often than not, look for excuses not to respond to the call. With tireless patience, God constantly seeks new ways to communicate, finally sending his own Son into the world.

Since it is a question of love, God can neither force human hearts nor transform them by a kind of magic. Love can only be an offer that leaves the other person free, or still more, that places the other squarely before his or her freedom.

The Book of Deuteronomy expresses this intuition in words that may shock or confuse us. Just before his death, on the eve of the entry into the

opposites (life-death, happiness-misfortune, etc.), it is a way of describing the totality of something. For example, when Jesus says to his disciples, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16,19; cf. John 20,23), it is the biblical way of saying that God has granted them full authority to judge. But this authority is to be used to forgive, to save.

In the same way, in the text mentioned above, Moses wants the Israelites to understand that by liberating them from Egypt and by showing them his love in so many ways, God does not take away their freedom of choice but, on the contrary, reveals their freedom to them as if for the very first time. Now, they are in a better position to understand what free choice is than when they were in the land of slavery. God's call allows them to realize that they are not puppets but beings called to responsibility, in other words called to give a free response. And the response God desires is clear: "Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of the Lord your God, listening to his voice, holding fast to him, for in this your life consists" (Deut 30,19-20).

And so, "God's infinite compassion" summons us to "an inner decision that is renewed at every moment," a choice

the domains of our existence. Our response to God becomes concrete in the responsibility that we take on for those God has entrusted to us. In the Book of Isaiah (42,1-4), the prophet paints the portrait of someone called "the Servant of the Lord," someone who is the partner God desires. His vocation is to communicate knowledge of God to the entire earth. And two attitudes characterize the way he fulfills his calling. Humility and discretion, first of all: in God's image, he does not impose himself; his faith is the very opposite of any "spiritual pretension." And second, the Servant is faithful; he perseveres come what may. He does not become discouraged by the difficulties along the way. He knows that faith does not mean "lighting fireworks that flare up and then go out," but that it bears its fruit over time and it must at times cross the deserts of the heart.

The early Christians saw in Jesus the figure of the Servant (cf. Matt 12,15-21). He came in humility, not wishing to impose himself by spectacular acts of power. At the same time, he gave his life to the very end in order to bring God's love to the whole of humanity. And he calls us to follow in his steps so that he can continue his pilgrimage through our lives. When we welcome his love and let it act in and around us, we bear, in our turn, "lasting fruit" (John 15,16).

MEDITATING ON THE WORD MAY

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

JOHANNINE HOURS

JEREMIAH 32:1-15

1 Wed All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had.

Ac 4:32-34

2 Thu A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jn 21:15-19

3 Fri The Lord God says: Look, I shall rescue my people, gathering them from east and west. They will be my people and I shall be their God, faithful and just.

Zc 8:7-8

4 Sat Paul writes: May your love be sincere, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Rm 12:9-13

5 SUN Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Jn 14:1-12

6 Mon Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us and that the world may believe that you sent me.

Jn 17:11-21

7 Tue I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me and said, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

Hab 2:1-4

8 Wed Clothe yourselves in humility in your relationships with others, for God gives his grace to the humble.

1 P 5:5-7

9 Thu The Lord is better than a fortress in time of trouble. God recognizes those who trust in him, even when the flood rushes on.

Na 1:7-8

10 Fri Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is no use to anybody.

Sl 30:21-25

11 Sat My hope is in the God who will save me. Though I lie in darkness, the Lord is my light.

Mi 7:7-8

12 SUN Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

Jn 14:15-21

13 Mon The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

Dt 4:29-31

14 Tue Seek perseverance, true devotion, brotherly kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 P 1:5-8

15 Wed The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Ex 22:20-21

16 Thu ASCENSION
Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

Mt 28:16-20

17 Fri Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. The Lord has forgiven you, do the same in your turn.

Col 3:12-17

18 Sat Jesus said: Anyone who finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Mt 10:38-39

19 SUN Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

Jn 17:1-11

20 Mon Make the Lord your joy; he will give you even more than your heart's desire.

Ps 37

21 Tue Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

Rm 12:14-21

22 Wed Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

1 Jn 2:24-28

23 Thu Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope.

Ps 62

24 Fri Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over many a sin.

1 P 4:7-11

25 Sat The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

Ezk 36:24-27

26 SUN PENTECOST
There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Spirit; there are different ways of serving, but it is the same Lord; there are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all.

1 Co 12:3-13

27 Mon Jesus said: The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Jn 6:57-63

28 Tue Daniel prayed saying: Listen to the prayer of your servant. For we rely not on our good deeds but on your great mercy.

Dn 9:18-19

29 Wed Jesus said: Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Lk 14:27-33

30 Thu St. Paul writes: Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle in your brother's way.

Rm 14:13-19

31 Fri On the cross, Jesus said: Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.

Lk 23:33-34

Jeremiah was detained in the Court of the Guard in the royal palace in Jerusalem, then besieged by an enemy army. So, Jeremiah is in a doubly desperate situation. And it is in this situation that, in due form, he purchases a field from his cousin. What does this action symbolise?

The prophet has been put in prison because he has spoken clearly. Ten years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had captured Jerusalem. He did not destroy it, but instead installed a vassal king, Zedekiah, of whom this passage speaks. After reigning for eight years, Zedekiah judged the time ripe to shake off foreign domination. He could certainly not leave Jeremiah at liberty, for, from the beginning of the reign, Jeremiah had said: "Bend your necks to the yoke of the king of Babylon." (Jr 27:12)

Why had Jeremiah spoken in such a way? He had to speak out, repeating these words, because God had made him understand the seriousness of the situation. He said of those who refused to face up to reality: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jr 6:14). Jeremiah had been interned because he had told the king and people that the crisis was deep-seated. It was no use clinging to pillars which were on the point of giving way: neither the royalty instituted by David, nor the Temple would survive.

Yet Jeremiah, the only one unafraid of calling things by their proper name, is also the only one who has a sure hope. He has it from God: "I know what plans I have in mind for you, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jr 29:11). And thus, when no one else is thinking of buying property because they've lost all hope in the future, Jeremiah, faithfully following God's call, buys the field which his cousin offers to him. This prophetic action points to a future beyond the ostensible end of the nation: "This is what the Lord says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this country" (Jr 32:15).

- Where does Jeremiah's trust in the future of his people come from?
- What can make us able to look lucidly on serious situations, while looking to the future with trust.
- By what actions can we today express our certainty in the future that God gives?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JUNE

These short readings proposed for reflection are taken from the midday prayer in Taizé. The reference shows where the text was taken from. Sometimes a longer reading is given, for those who wish to set the text in its context.

JOHANNINE HOURS

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-22

1 Sat Dt 30:11-14
God's Word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

2 SUN Jn 3:16-18
God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

3 Mon 1 S 12:20-24
Adore God alone; serve him faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things the Lord has done.

4 Tue 1 Jn 4:16-19
There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

5 Wed Mt 2:10
Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why then do we set ourselves in opposition to one another?

6 Thu Jn 6:47-51
Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

7 Fri Mt 4:1-11
Jesus said to the tempter: Away with you! For Scripture says, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone".

8 Sat Lk 12:22-31
Jesus said: Seek first God's Kingdom, and all other things will be given to you as well.

9 SUN Ps 145
All look to you in hope. And, with generous hand, you satisfy every living creature.

10 Mon 1 Co 10:23-31
Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

11 Tue Lk 18:18-23
Jesus said to a man: You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.

12 Wed Is 58:6-8
If your break unjust chains to let the oppressed go free, if you share your food with the hungry and shelter the homeless, then your light will break forth like the dawn, your wound will be quickly healed and the glory of the Lord will come behind you.

13 Thu 1 Jn 1:1-7
God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

14 Fri Is 55:6-11
Seek the Lord while he is near. Turn to our God, he pardons freely.

15 Sat 1 Co 1:26-31
God chose things that by human standards are weak to confound the strong. God chose what is lowly and despised in the eyes of the world.

16 SUN Mt 9:36-10:8
Jesus sent out the twelve, saying: Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

17 Mon Ezk 11:17-20
The Lord says: I will give an undivided heart to my people. I will put a new spirit in them.

18 Tue Mt 21:28-31
Jesus said: A father said to his two sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today." The first replied, "I will not," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The second replied, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will? Those listening said, "The first."

19 Wed Ps 94:14-22
When I say, "I am slipping," your faithful love, Lord, supports me.

20 Thu Ac 2:42-47
All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person.

21 Fri Mt 5:44-48
Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.

22 Sat Ps 138
Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.

23 SUN Ps 69:30-37
You who seek God, may your hearts live! For God listens to the poor.

24 Mon Is 49:1-6
St JOHN THE BAPTIST The Lord says to his servant: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

25 Tue Mt 6:25-34
Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life... Your Father in heaven knows what you need. Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.

26 Wed Rm 8:28-30
In all things God works for the good of those who love him, those who have been called according to his purpose.

27 Thu Ps 40:7-12
I said: Here I am, I have come, and as it is written, I desire to do your will, my God. Your law is deep within my heart.

28 Fri Jn 10:11-15
Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

29 Sat Mt 16:13-20
St PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

30 SUN Mt 10:37-42
Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, he will certainly not lose his reward.

At Salonika (Thessalonica, ancient Greece), St. Paul had founded one of the first Christian communities in Europe (see Acts chapter 17). He spent some time with this young Church, then he carried on preaching the Gospel in other towns in Greece. From Athens, mindful of the believers he had left at Salonika, he sent one of his co-workers, Timothy, to encourage them and to take them a letter.

Towards the end of his letter Paul gives very simple and practical instructions for the life of a Christian community. First of all he speaks of "those who work so hard among you" (v. 12), that is, say, those who have a ministry who are involved in the Church. Paul asks for them to be shown kind affection and to be held in esteem. For he knows that those who do something are also those who are the most vulnerable to criticism and misinterpretation.

All believers are called to watch over one another in order to avoid evil and encourage all that is good (vv. 14-15). It can even be necessary to "admonish" someone, that is, to say, to seek to enter into dialogue with them (but with them alone, between the two of you). says Jesus, cf. Mt 18:15) to make something clear. The aim is to encourage, to support, to help one another overcome hesitations.

"Aim at what is best" (v. 15) — is joy and thankfulness that keep us on the right path. And the force behind them is the Holy Spirit, like a fire which must not be smothered (v. 16-19). We don't know very well how, at the time of St. Paul, the "gift of prophecy" (v. 20) was exercised. But certainly the Holy Spirit ceaselessly inspires us, and we should not be afraid to express an intuition that we have and to live it out, even at the risk of making mistakes. Paul says clearly that it's always necessary to "put everything to the test," in consultation with others.

- What elements of the life of this ancient Christian community are present in our local church communities?

- What things do we need to look at again or renew, in the light of these words of St. Paul?

- Which expressions in this Biblical passage remind me of words of Jesus? How does the community life of Christians reflect something of the life of Christ?

ECHOES HEARD AFTER THE MEETING

After the meeting, we visited once again all of the parishes," explained several of the brothers and young people who had helped in preparations before the meeting. "We wanted to thank people and to apologize for any difficulties caused. The host families always said how thankful they were. Everyone had their own stories to illustrate the joy they found in welcoming the young people. Some would show us letters they had since received from their guests, or else demonstrated how they had managed to communicate. All were astonished by the level of seriousness and the kindness of the young people, about how they woke up early, even when tired, in order to have break-



fast with their host families and go to morning prayer. The parish preparation groups showed a great ability to improvise when necessary and unfailing devotedness. They found solutions for each unexpected problem, even when it meant forgoing precious rest during night hours. As we heard them tell their stories, we could see how they had succeeded in getting other young people involved, how they had shown themselves able to welcome young people who were not always in contact with their own parishes back home, and finally how they had managed to keep in contact with the individual host families. It reminded us of what Brother Roger said during the Sunday morning celebration in the cathedral, presided over by celebrants from Poland, Zaire, the Philip-



pines and Haiti: 'One can sense that, by virtue of a great simplicity, a springtime of the Church is approaching in Poland.'

There is reason to rejoice in knowing that these same parish groups will be continuing, whether it be in regular prayer, supporting those who care for the suffering, visiting the elderly and bedridden, or else in helping children. We can see that this adventure lived together allowed many young adults to feel that they are a part of their parish and that they share responsibility for it."

Since the return home from Wroclaw, participants have organized prayer and meetings in nearly all the cities of Europe. Many have written telling us how much new momentum the experience gave them for their daily commitments. It is a matter not only of the joy found in gathering with tens of thousands of other young people who are also trying to live in the steps of Christ, but also that inner joy which comes as we glimpse on the

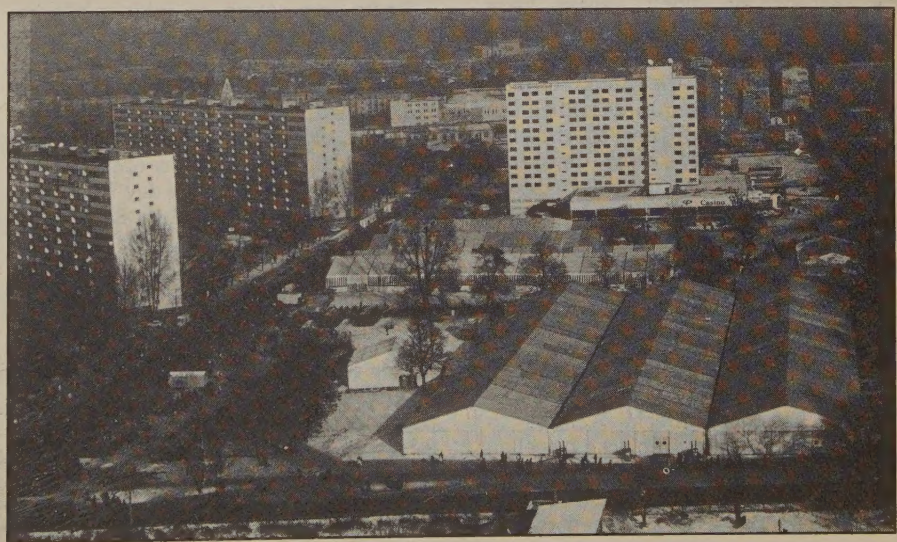
face of the Church, in which the risen Christ makes communion a reality.

"The Oder river divides the city of Wroclaw into many distinct parts," one young German writes, "and yet, at the same time, the city is one. In the same way, we crossed thousands of bridges throughout Europe in order to meet up with one another. We have found that we are able to understand one another, to share our inner wealth and walk together on the same road. All these bridges which we crossed once again in returning home need not now keep us from staying together through bonds of communion."

Morning prayer in one of the 160 host parishes

A televised celebration was held on Sunday morning in the Wroclaw cathedral

The tents for prayer had a surface area equivalent to two football fields





Listening to the Continents

Bosnia

The death of a child

One of the young people from Bosnia who had taken part in the European Meeting in Poland wrote after returning home:

"When we came home from Wrocław, I was welcomed into our house (in south-east Bosnia-Herzegovina) by a group of children from Sarajevo. The children who usually live with us all through the year had left for winter holidays, which meant that we were completely available for those who had just arrived. They made such a deep impression on us. We were close to tears as we listened to their heart-rending stories. They had been snatched away from their childhood long ago, just like the children who live with us and who have come through the same trials, at the other end of the country.

We asked them to write an account of a day that's engraved in their memory. Many of them wanted to, others didn't, for reasons we didn't always know. Sometimes it's better not to go too far in discovering the truth.

I remember nearly everything the children wrote. One little girl described how they had survived in their apartment in Sarajevo: "For many, many days there was always rice on the plate. Or else nothing at all. You almost forget that other things exist. And you live from little joys. One day, in place of rice, I saw an apple on my plate. I took it in my hands and I caressed it for a long time, a very long time. I thought it was such a pity to eat it. It was so beautiful."

Another child had this to tell: "We children like being in school. During the war, our schools were replaced by cellars. With dark corridors. It was cold and gloomy. One day, during the lesson, we heard the sound of a shell and then its

impact on the building. It had fallen in the corridor where we were. When we got up again and returned to our places, the place where Samir had been remained empty. He had been killed by the shell. And now the place where he used to sit is empty. We miss him very much."

Listening to these children, we were speechless, silent, just like in prayer. And maybe the true grandeur of the Church appears only through living witnesses, like these little children. Jesus taught in the Temple when he was twelve years old. The majority of these children are much younger. For the world, for us, they are children. For God, they are his lips."

The United States

Pilgrimages in New York

On Friday evening 6th October, over 150 students gathered at Fordham University, Manhattan. They came to prepare for the Eucharist to be celebrated the next day in Central Park by Pope John Paul II. They had been invited to help with the stewarding. During the evening, they prayed and shared together following a Bible introduction given by two brothers from Taizé. A video of John Paul II's visit to Taizé was shown, exactly nine years previously.

Long before dawn, everyone set out in the rain to take part in the great event. It was an important stage of the journey that took John Paul II to the United Nations, celebrating its 50th anniversary. During the sermon, they heard the Pope say to the young people: "Here in Central Park today, we are continuing the same spiritual pilgrimage that brought us together in Denver and in Manila, and we are preparing for the next World Youth Day, in Paris in 1997... At the ecumenical level, a similar pilgrimage is being made at Taizé in France. The driving force of all this movement of young people is always the Holy Spirit."

By its very nature, an interior pilgrimage is not limited to one single event. So a few weeks later, as a sign of continuity, the Taizé Brothers led a meeting in New York which brought together the same students, along with young people from different churches, for a day of prayer and sharing. The theme for the day was based on Jesus's words, as told by Saint John: "What are you looking for? Come and see."

Simultaneously, another group of people has undertaken a pilgrimage of prayer between churches in the metropolis. Every month, they go to a different church where they animate an evening of meditative prayer. The first halt on this pilgrimage was in Trinity Church, Wall Street, an historic Episcopalian parish set in the financial district of Manhattan. The sound of Taizé songs being sung in this venerable church situated among the

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high-rise buildings gives a fine image of the Church, right in the midst of contemporary society, yet with no pretensions. The following months, similar prayers have been held in a large Catholic parish in the center of the city, in a Methodist church on Park Avenue, in the chapel of Columbia University and in a small but very active Episcopalian parish in a run-down neighborhood on the Lower East Side. In this way, the pilgrimage of prayer makes visible the great diversity of situations in a city like New York and at the same time it is weaving simple links of communion. It's like a trail of light uniting all these varied realities; a simple prayer giving out a breath of trusting that enables people who are very different from one another to meet and to understand each other, without fear, beyond what separates them.

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